

ACTIVITY REPORT 2019

Support to organisations of persons with disabilities in developing countries

Abilis Foundation, registered in 1998, is a Finnish organisation established to promote the activity, human rights, equal opportunities and independent living of persons with disabilities in developing countries and in Eastern Europe. To accomplish this mission, the Foundation grants financial support and conducts awareness raising, education, training and counselling programmes. This includes global disability diplomacy on human rights with the aim of helping, directly or indirectly, persons with disabilities in least developed countries. Abilis Consulting, a company established and owned by Abilis Foundation, provides expert services tailored to the needs of various operators, thus complementing the Foundation's work to advance disability inclusion.

Abilis Foundation focuses on funding reliable small-scale, high-quality initiatives designed and implemented by organisations of persons with disabilities in least developed countries. This helps improve the involvement, position and opportunities of persons with disabilities in developing societies. Funding is only granted to states officially classified as LDCs. Individual grants are small – between 1,000 and 20,000 euro – the focus being on grassroots-level organisations in the least developed countries of the world.

Core funding from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The bulk of the funding comes from the Official Development Assistance administered by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. 2019 was the second year of a four-year funding period (2018–2021) and 1,950,000 euro was the amount received. An additional item of 306,623 euro was carried over from the previous year. The total amount of government support was thus 2,256,623 euro. In addition, 51,343 euro was available from the previous year of business partnership support (Finnpartnership) to Ethiopia (to help employ persons with disabilities), and 92,030 euro of British funding (TNLCF) to be used for projects in Tanzania and Uganda.

The Foundation's own fund raising produced 311,124 euro. Most of the income, 291,500 euro, was received as a bequest from the estate of Kalle and Maija Könkkölä.

Focus on nominated programme countries

In 2019, Abilis Foundation implemented a global programme according to plan. The global programme consists of subprogrammes; the principal actions being taken in the form of country programmes and a subprogramme for fragile states. Further subprogrammes were information and development communication as well as advocacy and disability diplomacy.

Country programmes were carried out in the following countries in Asia: Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam and Tajikistan, and in Africa: Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. The phasing out of country programmes continued in Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique. Key actors in the delivery of the country programmes and aid were appointed partnership organisations (in Ethiopia, Tajikistan, Mozambique and Kyrgyzstan) or country offices set up by the Foundation (in Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Tanzania and Uganda).

Support and distribution of grants

The Foundation processed 350 applications in 2019. Of these, 165 applications were approved for funding and 116 were rejected; the rest were put off being dealt with over the next financial year. The number of British co-funded projects was 20. The total funding granted by Abilis Foundation for new projects was 1,196,886 euro. A total of 1,339,059 euro was spent in new initiatives and launches from earlier years.

The grants were small, geared to the needs of groups of persons with disabilities living in poor rural environments. Project implementation, management and reporting were in line with the capacities of the rural groups. The average grant size was 7,254 euro. This complies with the decision of the Foundation Board to focus on max. 3,500-euro grants to newly founded groups and to small hands-on projects (58 projects). Excluding such small handouts, the average size of conventional grants, which were in majority (103), was 9,024 euro.

Project funding was targeted at Africa (55 %) and Asia (37 %), where the Foundation's main programmes are operated. Individual beneficiaries were in Latin America (seven projects, 4 %) and Eastern Europe (six projects, 4 %). In Africa, Tanzania was the biggest grantee (23 new projects, 136,566 euro). Uganda and Ethiopia received funding for 15 projects each (129,484 and 91,158 euro, respectively). Eight grants went to Mozambique (70,392 euro). In Asia, the major part of funding went to Tajikistan (18 grants, 122,985 euro). Support to Myanmar was up at 13 projects (87,845 euro). Eleven new grants were made to both Vietnam and Nepal. The average project size was higher in Nepal with a total grant of 103,887 euro. The total funding granted to Vietnam was 60,310 euro. Five new grants were made to Kyrgyzstan.

The subprogramme of fragile states focused on support to job opportunities and livelihood for persons with disabilities in nominated countries. Most of the support was channelled to Sierra Leone for 11 new projects (70,182 euro). Eight new projects (65,544 euro) went live in Somaliland and five (40,353 euro) in Somalia. Individual grants were made to Latin American and East European countries (13 grants, 98,020 euro). Of all the support, 80 % (133 project grants) went to the least developed countries of the world, and 72 % of the funding was channelled to key programme countries (119 new grants, 856,852 euro).

More than 28,000 persons with disabilities involved

In 2019, a total of 28,065 persons with disabilities actively benefited from Abilis Foundation's project funding. Well over a half (ca 54 %) were girls or women with disabilities. Indirectly, a multiple number of people were impacted. Through information campaigns and events more than three million people benefited from the Foundation's work. Most of the recipient organizations (71 %) operated in rural areas or in small towns, where the availability of community support or services is limited, and other funders are practically non-existent. As provided in the Foundation's strategy, support was directed to genuinely grassroots-level groups and organisations, some of which were officially registered with Abilis' assistance.

Active people and well-functioning organisations

Abilis Foundation approved 114 final reports in 2019. Most of the completed projects (82 %) lasted for less than two years. Prolonged projects, with durations over three years, accounted for 4 %. Thirteen projects had to be terminated, ten of these in Ethiopia, together with a partner organisation. The main reasons for project termination were insufficient capacity of the organisations or internal conflicts. No financial mismanagement was discovered, and no money had to be recovered.

The results of the completed projects comply with Abilis Foundation's strategic focus areas and country programmes. With increased awareness about disability, discrimination was significantly reduced in communities. This positive development was reported by 92 % of organisations for people with disabilities. Some 80 % of the project-implementing organisations reported higher level of cooperation with public authorities and other agencies. One in two projects brought new members to the organisations (56 %). Starting from the individual level, the change manifested itself in facts such as that 93 % project participants were able to take part in communal events because they now had more contacts with other community members and had grown aware of their rights. Improved self-esteem and family support helped improve their social engagement. After the project, 67 % were conscious of

their rights and of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will help them defend and fight for their own rights.

Developing activities

In 2019, the Foundation launched an assessment of projects concerning the employment and livelihood of persons with disabilities in Nepal and Sierra Leone. The results were used to develop a manual to help in the planning and implementation of successful projects. A special manual for results-based management was prepared for the Foundation in 2019. Key points of the approach were discussed in a partnership meeting in October 2019 in Helsinki, where all the main programme countries were represented. Other themes covered in the week-long event comprised programme work, gender equality and key project management tools, which have been upgraded as required by funders in the last few years. The programme included a meeting with representatives from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Abilis Board members.

Disability diplomacy and advocacy

In the early part of the year, the Foundation's advocacy work focused on political advocacy in advance of parliamentary elections and a new government programme. Later in the year, the focus shifted on cooperation with stakeholders. The key goal was to influence foreign policy and development policy to improve the position and involvement of persons with disabilities. The practical work included meetings, training sessions, advocacy work and information campaigns. The most tangible result was a note in the government programme to utilise the expertise of vulnerable groups themselves in matters concerning them. Together with the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Mission of Finland to the U.N., the Foundation co-hosted a side event at the meeting in June in New York of countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The theme of the event was political advocacy, and, at the same time, it was the memorial seminar to commemorate Kalle Könkkölä's global work.

Board work and registration of amended Bylaws

The Foundation's Board convened six times during the year. In addition to financial decisions and general administration, the Board actively contributed to the implementation of plans for the financial period and formulated policies required by high-quality and effective programme work. In October, the Board decided to apply for additional funding in a special call announced by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the programme-supported organisations. The application was for 1,170,000 euro (for years 2020 to 2021). In December, the members of the Board were elected for 2020 to 2021. The new bylaws were confirmed by the Finnish Patent and Registration on 5 March 2019. The amendments concerned the appointment of Board members after the death of the founding member Kalle Könkkölä. The actual reform work had been done in autumn 2018.

Owing to the nature of the Foundation, no support or financial benefits are granted to related parties; the funding goes solely to support disabled people's organisations in developing countries, as is clearly stated in the Foundation's related-party policy. No financial agreements were made with related parties. The Members of the Board were paid regular meeting fees, 5,230 euro in total. The Chair was also paid a remuneration of 6,000 euro for her disabled diplomacy work and 1,505 euro for travel expenses including per diem allowance. The Executive Director received 1,493 euro in expense and per diem allowances. Salaries, fees, and remunerations paid to the Foundation's management (Board, Executive Director and the Managing Director of Abilis Consulting) totalled 69,320 euro. Auditor fees amounted to 8,432 euro. Travel expenses were reimbursed for according to the Foundation's travel compensation rules on an actual expense basis.

Key resources

The average person-years contributed in 2019 were 11. Eleven people were regularly employed and three worked part-time. Two of the part-timers worked through the year (80

%), and one started in March (40 %). The personnel were paid remuneration in the form of salary, benefits in kind and per diem allowance as provided in the regulations applicable in Finland and in compliance with the Foundation's approved payroll system and personnel policy rules. The financial statements were audited by Registered Accountants Kristian Seemer and Anssi Pietiläinen. Deputy Auditors were Kari Mikkola and Tero Paukku. The financial statements were prepared by Administer Oy and the electronic financial management system employed was eFina. The project management tool was the Arkisto database (Salesforce).

Abilis Consulting

Abilis Consulting Limited, owned by Abilis Foundation, completed two in-progress assignments in the early part of the year. The clients were Finnish Red Cross and Fairtrade Finland and the assignments focused on the improvement of disability inclusion and support to persons with disabilities in crisis situations. Abilis Consulting provided training in the basics of disability inclusion and negotiated with several agencies. The results of the negotiations will become apparent over 2020 and 2021 as the implementation of the planned assignments starts. Two new assignments for the Finnish Red Cross began during the year and were still running in early 2020. The company produced a loss of 13,045 euro, mainly on account of one-off expenses.

Risks and uncertainty factors

The major uncertainty factors affecting the Foundation's overall activities and support work are associated with the availability of continued funding and the appropriate observation of changing procedures required by donors. Even critical perspectives on development aid are a trend that may affect the prospects of future funding and the operating environment. The highest risk at the programme and project level is corruption and the misuse of granted funds. Natural disasters, humanitarian crises and unexpected changes in a country's political situation or the internal circumstances of an organisation complicate the delivery of projects. In 2019, the Foundation continued advocacy work to ensure further funding and to lessen criticism of development aid. Due diligence and risk minimisation measures continued using the project management mechanisms developed over the years.

2019 expenses and financial standing

The disposable funds available to Abilis Foundation consisted of 2,256,623 euro of government funding, 51,343 euro of partnership support and 308,258 euro of British funding. The support paid to organisations of persons with disabilities in developing countries was 1,339,059 euro. Information expenses were 74,368 euro, project management expenses 554,480 euro and administrative expenses 187,805 euro. The amount used for disability diplomacy on human rights was 108,757 euro. The remaining government support to be brought forward to 2020 was 66,497 euro. British funding for the pilot year (187,334 euro for 2018 to 2019) was spent up, and the spending report was filed in August 2019. A new two-year follow-up project (216,228 euro) started in November, and the first instalment of 117,630 euro arrived in December 2019. Of Finnpartnership support, 15,558 euro was carried forward to be used in 2020.

Services to drive the disability diplomacy initiative were bought from the Threshold Association at standard cost (7,063 euro). Vice Chair Amu Urhonen was serving as the Association's Acting Executive Director from early 2019. The Foundation granted a short-term loan of 30,000 euro to the Threshold Association from the Foundation's own fundraising income. The Threshold Association has repaid loan instalments as scheduled. After the closing of the financial period, it has repaid 10,000 euro and only the last instalment of 4,000 euro remains to be settled.

As prescribed in Kalle and Maija Könkkölä's last will, Abilis Foudation set up a memorial trust in their name. The testamentary assets will be invested in early 2020 and annual return will be controlled through a self-contained restricted fund. The Threshold Association owed

38,500 euro to Kalle Könkkölä's estate, and according to the will these funds should have gone to Abilis Foundation. A special agreement was made by the Threshold Association and Abilis Foundation as to how this portion of the bequest will be compensated to the Foundation. The Foundation will keep the annual return of the invested assets for eight years, after which the return will be divided in half with the Threshold Association provided that the latter is engaged in development work.

The Foundation's surplus for the year was 10,446 euro and consolidated loss was 2,600 euro.

Outlook for 2020

Together with KIOS and Siemenpuu Foundation, Abilis will conduct an evaluation in early 2020 of the benefits and efficacy of a foundation as an operating model. The ensuing recommendation will be used to improve the programme work and the preparation of future funding applications. The favourable decision of additional funding received in early 2020 makes it possible to continue active project funding and to uphold the designated actions. Above all, the Foundation will be able to increase project funding to the organisations of women with disabilities and to groups operating amid humanitarian crises. Further personnel resources will enable stronger advocacy work in 2020 and 2021.

Abilis Foundation will continue development work and prepare instructions for the programme countries and projects to support sustainable and effective activities. The preparation of a safeguarding manual and training material started in early 2020 in a participatory way. A guide to support adoption to environmental change will be compiled, and the handbook for working in fragile states and circumstances will be updated in 2020. The work to upgrade the results matrix and risk management will help ensure the quality and effectiveness of the activities throughout. In autumn 2020 the Foundation will revise its strategy and update the strategies for various programme countries. Monitoring and assessment trips will be taken to collect background information needed to draw up plans and submit a funding application for the years 2022 to 2025.

The Covid-19 pandemic may affect the Foundation's work in 2020. The Foundation contributes actively in the fight against the virus and, if necessary, will grant support for the distribution of hygiene kits and information about the prevention of the disease in an accessible manner.